

The Condition of Jamatia Women: A Historical Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The paper describes in detail about the conditions of women in historical analysis. As we know that the Jamatia tribe is one of the main tribe of Tripura, having distinct feature of mongoloid origin. They speak kok-borok language which is a language of Tibeto-Burman family. Jamatias is known for their significant contribution in the Royal Army of Tripura. Jamatia's were freed from paying different kind of taxes like Ghar chukti tax, Titun and many others for their service in the Royal Army of Tripura. Jamatias mostly concentrated in Udaipur, Amarapur and Teliamura.

Sri Rajmala states that the Jamatias were the important fighting tribes of Tripura during the reign of the early kings and formed the hardcore of royal army, it is known that among the Hill subjects of Tripura, Jamatia were the fighting caste. They, in the olden days, used to work in the army of the king of Tripura. The army constituted by them called 'Jamat', and from the word Jamat, they, later on, came to be known as Jamatias. The Jamatias were, "kailash Chandra singha writes, "one of the pure branches of Tripuris. B.C. Allen also calls them the fighting caste of Tripura¹.

In the context of Omesh saigal holds the view that Jamat in urdu means an assemblage of persons. The former rulers of Tripura used to recruit his army from a class of tribals who were not only warriors but also had proved their loyalty to him. A fair proportion of his armed forces were drawn from amongst the Jamatias who formed a group in his army, and it was from this fact that they derived their clan name².

The Jamatia believe that the term Jamatia is derived from the word jama (an Arabic word which means tax) and twia (a kokborok word which means not to bear the burden of). So the word Jamatia means persons who do not bear the burden of taxes. They hold the opinion that the Jamatias enjoyed these privileges for their military duties³.

The opinion of Kali Prasana Sen, the author of Rajmala (history of Tripura) is almost similar with that of Jamatia themselves regarding the origin of Jamatias. In both the opinions the Jamatias are mentioned as the most important fighting tribes of Tripura as they were recruited as Speical Armies and posted permanently in border areas to protect the kingdom from raiders and invaders⁴.

In fact, this research paper will represent the conditions of Jamatias women in historical perspective. Prior to the modern era, the condition of Jamatias women is so pathetic. They were neglected from pursuing education and preferred to get married at the early age. They were confined to the house as domestic servant and they looked after their children for special care. From the long past, they engaged in different task such as shifting cultivation, weaving of thread, animals breeding, cooking, collection of firewood, raising of crops, home-made liquor etc. Earlier women were completely dominated by men in every field and also the women have to act as per the men because men hold the important position in the family. Hence, the birth of men is welcomed by all the family members. Therefore, they held the responsible to take the major decisions in the family. But with the passage of time, the condition of women is improving to a greater extent. Yet, they got liberation from any kind of barriers. Therefore, now, they were having a great opportunity to grab all the benefits as equivalent to men.

This paper will make a critical analysis on the conditions of women and how far they improve their life-style in day-to-day life. This paper will compare the conditions of women from then and now.

KEYWORDS: weaving of thread, collection of firewood, breeding of animals, empowerment of women etc

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Tripura is a tiny state of north-eastern India where 19 tribes and non-tribal communities are residing simultaneously. However, conditions of Jamatias women is discussed below-

Dress and Ornaments: The weaving of thread is common in Jamatias women like the other tribe of Tripura. They have their own traditional dress and ornament which is very unique. The pattern and design of jamatias women Rignai is very colourful and beautiful. Generally, the thread is purchased from market in different colors to make the Rignai and Risa with beautiful design which is wore by them. The dress of women for lower half of the body is called Rignai and upper half is termed as Risa and Ritukuk. However, the technique of weaving thread is primitive and it is made by hand. Regarding ornaments, they used brindabanful, wakhung, ganthimala and many others. They wear Nokfu (nose ring) wakhung (ears ring) and Yastam (finger ring) besides, a string of beads in different colors. Probably, all the women who are living in villages use traditional attire on gigantic scale. But, it is unfortunate to say that the wearing of Rignai among the youngsters Jamatia's women is extremely rare.' Mrs. Kabita Rani Jamatia was of the view that despite its unique beauty, the traditional dresses of Jamatia are on the verge of extinction. Hence she requested all the educated persons to use the traditional items in their day to day life. This is mainly because she believed that the educated people are more likely to be an idol of other people of the society. She had also requested all the men to help the women in weaving⁵.

Collection of firewood: Jamatia women primarily depend on firewood for cooking purpose. They collected the firewood from jungle with the aid of basket (Langa) putting on their back shoulder with rope. Later they used it for cooking food. As long as when the gas cylinder becomes common with the improvement of technology, the collection of firewood decreases. However, cooking of food with firewood is not stopped at all. Still, it is used as alternative of gas cylinder. But the use of firewood is confined to rural areas not in urban.

Domestication of animals:-The breeding of different animals is widely practiced in Jamatias and also regarding the domestication of animals, the contribution of women is huge. Therefore, the animals are used for both meat and milk. The profession of rearing animals is quite beneficial because it helps to earn money by selling it into the market. However, the task of rearing animals is manipulated by women besides men. And, the rearing of animals like cow is extensively used into the field to dig up land with iron plough for agriculture.

Agriculture:- India's primarily depends on agricultural activities. About 70% of India population engaged in agricultural activities. Like other parts of India, Jamatia's is also practice agriculture cultivation. In terms of agriculture, the contribution of Jamatias women is huge. They actively participated in agricultural activities while planting and harvesting crop along with their husband. Initially, they cultivate their field naturally with primitive technology such as iron plough and at that time they got less production due to insects. But with the introduction of modern technology, they enabled to use pesticides, chemical fertilizers, HYV seeds which helped them to get more yield as much as possible. Before they cultivate their field once in a year, but yet they can do multiple cropping which enhance their economic conditions. Recently, it can be seen that agriculture activity is reducing in the rural area due to the introduction of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) by the Government of India since 2005.

Empowerment of women:- Education of women is the most indispensable factor for the development of nation. Similarly, education is important for everyone, but it is most important for girls and women. "If you educate a man you educate a women you educate a whole family. Women empowered means mother India empowered"- Jawaharlal Nehru⁶. Education is quite negligible among the Jamatias women since the long past. Earlier, most of the parents preferred them to get married at the young age due to poverty and also for some norms. They were confined to the house and worked in their own house. It is observed that like other parts of India, Tripura also lacks in the field of tribal women of Tripura in various white-coloured jobs seems to be negligible due to their backwardness in education. Either be the aspects of political representation or social status; either be the aspects of economic empowerment or educational opportunities; they form the level of minority⁷. The tribal people, who dwell in the far flung remote hilly areas, are mostly deprived of the essential requirements of normal human beings such as:- food, shelter, clothing, health, education etc. If we want that they should also lead a comfortable life, then we must think of their real problems in a practical manner as Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation had always insisted that India would become truly independent only when the poorest of its people would be free from sufferings. How to feed their stomach? - is a burning question in front of them. Therefore, the tribals of the hilly and dense forest areas should be well-trained in acquiring their means of living, i'e "the livelihood skills" in a better manner⁸. Therefore, they are becoming free

due to the eradication of social inequalities and now state government is also reserved 33% seats for the women in job opportunities of the state Tripura.

Collection of water: Water is source of life. It is one of the most essential nutrients for living beings. But fresh drinking water is not found everywhere. Prior to the hand-pump and water supply, there is a lot of problem of drinking water in the tribal area. Therefore, women are responsible for the collection of water and they used to collect it with steel pot. Initially, the condition of drinking water is worse as compared to present days because the water from wells is not safe for drinking which is uncovered and unprotected. The drinking of water from wells leads to several health issues such as cholera, typhoid, jaundice etc. At that time, no fresh water is available and most of the people rely on wells which is not good at all for drinking purpose. 'As could be expected the drinking water scarcity was most common in study areas where 57% of population suffers acutely. Similarly, Ray (1990) observed that in Amarpur area 85% population of Reang community suffers from similar problem. It was observed that 91% of tribal families in the present study used drinking water without any purification. This might be due to ignorance and lack of social education which reflects on the existence of a high rate infection and infestations. The high rate of Diarrhoeas (54%) observed in the present study might be due to the effects of intestinal parasites which developed by using unsafe drinking water. It could be well argued that chronic diarrhoea caused mainly by intestinal parasites and are one of the most important factors leading to the development of latent or overt malnutrition. In a survey in the Bombay area where among children below 12 years, 62% had stool positive for either one or more of rounds worms, thread worms, giardia, hookworm and entameba histolytica, caused by unsafe drinking water and poor environmental hygiene (Phadke et al 1971). Studies were done by many workers that various that intestinal parasites can produce growth retardation of children and diseases reducing the absorption of vitamins and other nutrients (Shukla 1982) Apart from intestinal infestations, systematic parasite and bacterial infections which is developed from unsafe drinking water also produce a deleterious effect on nutritional status (Shukla, 1982) '9. It is worth to mention here that while the government is taking the necessary steps to resolve these problems, the issues for drinking water is reduced to some extent.

Shifting Cultivation: Shifting cultivation is common among Jamatias tribe. It is called the "Hook-chalaima" in kokborok language. Regarding shifting cultivation, the contribution of women is huge. They

used to sow the seeds of different kinds in the Jhoom field. Prior to the shifting cultivation, they find the plot and select the land which is left untouched for several years. Later, they cleared the small patches of land with different tools viz. dao, digging stick and other equipments. After all, the field was left for a while and waiting for a monsoon rain. Later, they burn it when rain comes. But the selection of land is finalized by ochai (holy priest) through magico-religious function. Besides Jhoom, small hut is built to protect jhoom field from wild animals. They harvested the crop between September and October. Now, however, Jhoom is practiced to supplement their economic conditions.

Home- made liquor:- Wine plays a pivotal role in the life of Jamatias. It is part and parcel of Jamatias tribe. The preparation of wine is found in almost every house of Jamatias. In terms of preparing wine, several things are needed such as chuwa, bati (earthen jar), pipe and bottle. Women are skillful in this activity. The taste of wine is depends on chuwa which is made up of different things viz. bark of chengthuang and chuwathoi leaves and many others. Later this was mixed up with the powder of rice. "For the preparation of chok/arak first of all chokman is put into an earthen pot known as baatiwa. Another earthen pot known as baatikhorok with a hole on the back is placed upside down on the mouth of the baatiwa. The point where the two pots joins is covered with the mixture of chokman and mud to make it air tight so that the stream does not come out. Then one end of a bamboo tube (soboso) is fitted to the hole of the baatikhorok. Here also the leak of the joining is closed with chokman and mud. The other hand of the bamboo tube is inserted to a container called Patni where the wine is stored. Then the chokman is brewed and vapour comes out through the bamboo tube and deposited into the patni and then wine of the patni is packed in bottles. Thus through the distillation process the chokman is brewed and wine is prepared¹⁰. Generally, wine is used for different kinds of activities such as entertaining guests, medicine etc. It is believed that no occasions are celebrated without wine. Therefore, drinking of wine devastate the life of many families. Generally, men use to have wine and create a unpleasant situation in the family by beating his wife and not caring about the family which further destroy the of the family. It seems that these days the drinking of wine is reduced somehow due to the improvement of education among the Jamatias people.

Sports and games- Tripura is a land of traditional games and sports. The traditional games of Tripura are known as Thwgmung in Kokborok language. It is common in all the tribes of Tripura. The youth of

Tripura are very much interested in traditional games and sports such as Kaldang, cooking game, yangla baharu and many more. Earlier, the participation of Jamatias women in terms of games and sports is very less. But, by the time the participation of women in games and sports is increases due to the removing of social obligations. Yet, they participated in different games and sports like Athletics, Football, Kabbadi and many more. These days, the state government is also encouraging the girls to participate in it.

Trade and commerce- Jamatias women played a pivotal role in trade and commerce. From the ancient times, Jamatias women are engaged in different task such as weaving of thread, domestication of animals and many more. Initially, the door of women is not open at all to be engaged in trade and commerce. But, now it seems that in every sphere women have participated pertaining to economic activities such as shopkeepers, vegetables sellers, weavers and many others as similar to men. Yet, they became economic freedom and looked after the family. It is worth to mention here that, now women are becoming capability to provide money to the children from their own pocket to meet the educational expenses including their basic amenities.

Health and Hygiene- It is well known that the health and hygiene are closely related to each other. Personal hygiene is the most pre-requisite for several reasons such as personal well-being, social health, psychological health and many more. Keeping hygiene is very important part of life because it helps the people to prevent the spread of infections, illness and bad odors. Initially, people are not aware about their health and hygiene because of illiterate and poverty. For instance, there are many Jamatias women who were facing a lot of problems while pregnant such as increasing of bad cholesterol, hypertension etc which further destroys their life. And even they lived in a far- flung area which is far away from the hospitals and and health centres and they do not visiting the doctor regularly for check up of their health. But these days, they became aware of their health due to the improvement of education and modernization among them.

Suggestions:-

1. There is negligence of women in terms of status, education and position in the society. So this kind of barriers should be removed in order to enhance their conditions.
2. Women should be given equal wages as men in terms work. For instances, in some cases women were not paid same amount as equal to men.
3. Every guardian should send their daughter to the school regularly.

4. Women should be given full freedom to express their talent before society in place of binding them into the domestic work.

Conclusion:- From the above analysis it can be concluded that the conditions of Jamatia women is not good from the ancient times. Before, they suffered a lot of problems due to social obligation in every sphere. Till today, their condition is not improved at all. There are some reasons for which Jamatias women is lagging behind such as negligence of education, poverty and many others. Therefore, such type of conditions may be developed if the education is giving importance by them to a great extent.

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